

Bombay Natural History Society



Founded 1883

PRESIDENT
B. G. DESHMUKH
I. A. S. (Retd.)

Ref. 3034/2003

August 18, 2003

Dear Member,

I was on a personal visit to a small village in the south, close to the city of Madurai and what impressed me most was that the cost of living is about 50 % less than Bombay, and the stillness and the silence of the night had a clarity that one never experienced in the city. Unfortunately, koels burst into song everyday at three in the morning. If the number of koels one heard was any indication, the crows of the area are particularly dumb, from the rate at which they were being cuckolded. The latest issue of the *Hornbill* has a well written article on brood parasitism by Ranjit Manakadan. Unfortunately we failed him in not captioning the illustration accompanying it, a beautiful photograph taken in Kashmir by Loke Wan Tho, of a massive juvenile Common Cuckoo about to be fed by its foster parent, a diminutive Plumbeous Redstart. Loke was an artist with the camera. Indeed, black and white photography is an art, and the best in wildlife photography was seen in the works of M. Krishnan, TNA Perumal, M.Y. Ghorpade and Loke Wan Tho. Presently, there is only one Black and White photo artist to equal them, Ian Lockwood.

Before burying myself in the silence of the backwoods for a month, I had attended a meeting of the IUCN's MIKE (Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants) project at Bangalore. Started in Africa to keep track of elephant poaching, a similar network was planned for India where the tuskers are "harvested" when they reach their prime.

Over the centuries, elephants have been on their way out. One has only to read the historical distribution of the elephant in India to see how slender is their chance of survival in the wild. Vivek Menon, the expert on wildlife trade in his book *Tusker: The Story of the Asian Elephant* blames Japan and China and their insatiable need for ivory for personal seals. Asian ivory being preferred, the demand for ivory in Japan and China will prove to be the Seal of death for the Asian Elephant. In this gloomy preview of extinction, the only relieving factor was the meeting with old friends. Charles Santiapillai who keeps track of elephant mortality in Sri Lanka (5000 in a decade) had a delightful story about the collection of local names by a bird enthusiast from the West. One of the bird names recorded translated as "Must ask my uncle". Apparently the guide did not know the name and wanted to consult his uncle but was misunderstood and the bird got a new name for the West. The story reminded me of a story related to me by the late Mr. V. K. Chari, formerly Asst. Curator at the Society. According to him, one of the larks described from Andhra Pradesh had a more than somewhat risqué name when translated into Telugu. He blamed the perverted sense of humour of the man who was asked the local name. Mr. Chari, being a prim and proper person, would not translate for me. It is a pity that traditional English common names which have been used for over a century in India have been arbitrarily changed without rhyme or reason.

How do common names evolve? T.C. Jerdon who wrote the first collation on birds in 1862 called as the Rose Parakeet the parakeet named by Linnaeus in 1777 as *Psittacula cyanocephala*, which translates as blue head. In 1895, Oates in the Fauna of British India, the second comprehensive work on Indian Avifauna, changed the name to the delightful Blossom-headed Parakeet, which the species carried for the next nearly hundred years to the time when the Southern race with the richer coloured bluish red head was separated as

... 2 ...

Hornbill House, Dr. Salim Ali Chowk, (Opp. Lion Gate), Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai - 400 023.

Tel. : 2282 1811 • Fax : (91 - 22) 2283 7615 • Gram : HORNBILL

E-mail - Office : bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in • Director : bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in

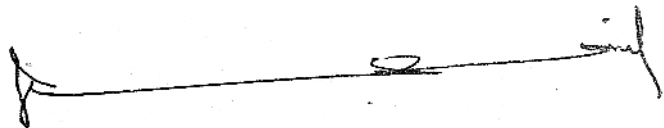
Website : www.bnhs.org

a valid species and given the name of Plum-headed Parakeet, while the reddish headed northern form retained the name of Blossom-headed Parakeet. Common names are peculiarly national, and unless there is valid reason, as in this case, should not be changed. "Standardised Common and Scientific names of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent" have been published in the Society's ENVIS Newsletter *Buceros* Vol. 6(1) for the year 2001 by Ranjit Manakadan and Aasheesh Pittie.

The event of the year is the release of the special issue of the 100th volume of the Society's Journal at the NCPA auditorium at Nariman Point, Mumbai scheduled for 12th November 2003, the birthday of the late Dr. Sálim Ali. The Journal will be released by two student members of the Society's Conservation Education Centre's Hornbill Clubs in schools in Mumbai and Hyderabad. The selection process will be through an essay competition. The released volume will be received by the Chief Guest. The programme also includes the award of the Sálim Ali International Conservation Award to Dr. George Schaller, the world renowned conservationist. The Award for Life Time Contribution to Ornithology to Dr. T.J. Roberts, the author of *Birds of Pakistan*, the award for Excellence in Ornithology to Mr. Lavkumar Khacher and for Special Contribution to the study of Indian Ornithology to Mr. J.P. Irani, the reputed illustrator of Indian bird books. The three ornithological awards are from the trustees of the Sálim Ali Loke Wan Tho Ornithological Research Fund of the Society. The programme includes a presentation by Mr. Valmik Thapar on the Society, a classical dance performance by Mallika Sarabhai's troupe entitled "Birds". Mr. Vijay Crishna will be the Master of Ceremonies. All this will be followed by dinner on the NCPA lawns. The following three days the Society will host a seminar on conservation entitled "A look at threatened species". The title refers to the article of the same name published by Lee Talbot in the *Oryx* magazine of the Fauna Preservation Society of UK, which first drew attention to the precarious status of the Indian Rhinoceros and other endangered species of SE Asia. Dr. Talbot, Dr. Schaller and other scientists who had done research on Indian wildlife as well as Indian Scientists who have researched on Indian wildlife will participate in the Seminar. Members are welcome, and are invited to participate in the NCPA function and the Seminar. As accomodation is limited, please register by filling in and returning the enclosed Registration form. All members who are registered for the Seminar are automatically invited for the NCPA function.

The Society's members who have contributed financially to the advancement of the activities of the Society are honoured by being named as a Vice Patron of the Society. One of our particularly distinguished Vice Patrons is Dr Pratap Saraiya who was Hon. Treasurer of the Society and Chairman of the Publications Sub-Committee. He has contributed substantially to the publications programme of the Society.

Warm regards



**J C Daniel
Honorary Secretary**

Bombay Natural History Society



Founded 1883

Ref. 2161/2002

June 17, 2002

Dear Member,

We make a request in the application of membership to the Society to indicate your field of interest in natural history. Along with my last newsletter I repeated the request with the names of the staff who could act as facilitators. The response has been feeble and restricted to Mumbai. Incidentally, I forgot to list the name of one of our stalwarts Dr (Mrs) S Unnithan who looks after our bird collection and continues its cataloguing which Humayun Abdulali started. She is a good communicator. I also left out the Director as he already has his hands more than full. I still look forward to hearing from you. Membership is the mainstay of the Society. The larger the membership, the more vigorous and independent its voice for the cause of conservation. We are stalled at approximately 5000 members, inclusive of all categories for the past few years, and there is an urgent need for a breakthrough. We seek your assistance.

To make the membership of the Society more attractive, we offer two options:

1. If you renew for three years, we offer a concessional subscription of Rs.1,150/- (Rs.1,875/- for Family Membership) and one of our publications (*A Century of Natural History* edited by J C Daniel) as a gift.
2. If you renew for five years, the subscription will be Rs.1,900/- (Rs.3,000/- for Family Membership) and one among four of our publications namely *The Book of Indian Animals* by S H Prater, *Some Beautiful Indian Trees* by E Blatter & W S Millard, *The Book of Indian Trees* by K C Sahni, and *The Book of Indian Shells* by Deepak Apte, as gift, as against the normal Rs.400/- (Rs.650/- for Family Membership).

One of the decisions of your committee was to commemorate the memory of Humayun Abdulali by naming the bird collections room where he had worked for over thirty years studying and cataloguing the bird collection. This was done at a simple ceremony on 20th May, when Dr. Rachel Reuben, in the presence of the Abdulali family, unveiled his portrait and a brass plaque naming the hall as the Humayun Abdulali Bird Room. The painting of Mr. Humayun Abdulali was done by Mr. J.P. Irani, the well-known bird artist, as a tribute to Mr. Abdulali. We are indebted to Mr. Irani for this generous donation. Mr. Abdulali's family donated his set of the *BIRDS OF THE SOVIET UNION* to the Bird Room library. A bird watching outing was led by Mr Sunjoy Monga on 19th May at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

We will be releasing two publications during July/August, the *BIRDS OF WETLANDS AND GRASSLANDS*, a collection of papers presented at the Salim Ali Centenary Seminar in 1996. This was delayed by various unfortunate circumstances. The delay does not affect the quality of the papers presented which have been carefully edited by the Director, Dr Asad Rahmani and Publications Officer, Dr Gayatri W. Ugra. The book will be a useful addition to the library of Institutions and persons interested in the highly endangered wetlands and grasslands. The second release will be the revised and updated version of my Reptile book to which I have added a section on Amphibians. I have always been fascinated by frogs, possibly because they are the safest to study, being the most non-violent of animals. They do not bite, sting, kick, gore, scratch, or show any other aggressive behaviour, and are satisfied to puff themselves up and hope they will not be swallowed by a passing snake.

....2....

Hornbill House, Dr. Salim Ali Chowk, (Opp. Lion Gate), Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai - 400 023

Tel.: 282 1811 • Fax: (91 - 22) 283 7615 • Gram: HORNBILL

E-mail - Office: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in • Director: bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in

Website: www.bnhs.org

....2....

I had the opportunity of looking at some of the theses of the postgraduate students of Dr. Erach Bharucha at the Bharatiya Vidyapeeth School of Environmental Sciences. One among them was of particular significance as it concerned the status of the Khadakvasla lake, the main source of water to Pune City. The lake apparently is half silted up and its watershed degraded to such an extent that it would need considerable effort, time and money to be revived. Pune seems to be particularly careless about water conservation and insensitive to its citizens' water needs. There was a plan to do away with the bund and thereby destroying the stability of the city's borewells. The rapid urbanisation of the surrounding hills, with high rise buildings makes one wonder whether any consideration has been given to ground water resources. Pune citizens are of more than average intelligence and it is surprising that the possibility of running out of water in a decade or two has not received the attention it deserves. If members in Pune would like to organize a seminar for an action plan for the city's water conservation, we would be happy to extend such assistance as may be needed.

I attended a meeting of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN in May. I was the Chairman when the group was started in 1976, and we met whenever we had funds to call all the members of the group to review what was happening to the elephant throughout its Asian distribution. This time we met in at Phnom Penh in Cambodia, which still has a small remnant population inspite of the Indo-Chinese War, the Khmer Rouge and the Pol Pot disaster. It is believed that an international meeting would help the local government in conserving their endangered elephants. The largest contingent was from India, and as it happens invariably whenever and wherever there are more than one of us, we split and splintered into vociferous groups trumpeting disagreement like mastodons in a marsh. Fortunately, an internecine squabble in front of an International audience was avoided. An action plan for conservation of the elephant throughout its range was prepared. How far our good intentions will succeed depends on the willingness of governments to take action on the plan. One of the mysteries of Indochina is that there are no house crows. None beyond the borders of Thailand. If we can find the reason, perhaps we can reduce our crow population. I missed seeing Angkor Wat and that will be one of my life time regrets.

We have been contacting members of the Society who have been members for 50 years and more. There are 14 of them. We plan to felicitate them suitably and publish a brief biodata and a photograph, if available, in the *Hornbill*.

The World Environment Day was celebrated by organising an exhibition of Wildlife Photographs by Mr. Adhik Shirodkar, the well-known criminal lawyer and former Rajya Sabha member and a life member of the Society. The week long exhibition was inaugurated by the President of the Society Mr B G Deshmukh.

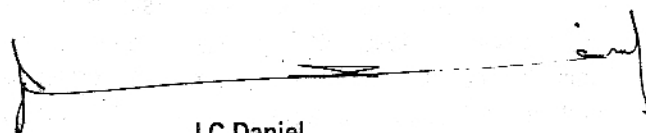
The biannual Salim Ali International Award is to be awarded this year. If you have candidates for consideration by the Award Committee., please write to us for the award application form.

Finally two twists in the tale, both from the Benny Hill TV show.

One on the old "Collection" attitude -- *"Preserve Wildlife: Pickle a Snake"*.

Another a take off on cloning, using a Nursery rhyme: *"Mary had a little lamb
and her doctor died of shock"*.

Warm regards



J C Daniel
Honorary Secretary

Bombay Natural History Society



Founded 1883

Ref.No. 2550/2001

9th June 2001

Dear Member,

There was a deeply mourned death in the BNHS family. Humayun Abdulali passed away on Saturday 2nd June, 2001. He was 87. Humayun was Salim Ali's cousin and alter ego, and they were responsible for preventing the BNHS, which was an expatriate British Society, from sliding into oblivion after independence. The family was involved in the freedom fight and they had clout with the government, which assured financial support and finally Hornbill House and stability for the Society. When I joined the Society as a Research Assistant in 1950, Salim Ali was gradually handing over the reins, which he took over in 1947, to Humayun, who was to run the Society for the next 12 years. They were then Jt. Honorary Secretaries, and it was Humayun who recruited me. I was a zoologist and it was largely Humayun who turned me into a naturalist: to look at the living world. An acute observer, he was interested in everything that flew, crawled, walked, crept, swam and that grew on the soil. Other than his major papers, he published a large number of notes in the Society's *Journal* on the life that he saw in the wild. He was the "Compleat" Naturalist. He was a warm hearted person but successfully hid it, and his habit of unflinchingly calling a spade a bloody shovel did not help. The Society had a soft and a stern face. Humayun acted the latter, and Salim Ali often fired over his shoulder. It was most unfortunate that their partnership fell apart. The immediate cause was the bird migration studies. While Humayun suggested ringing waders and ducks, Salim Ali opted for the passerines and the simmering feud blew up. Though Humayun was proved right, both were mulish and the ensuing years were neither good for them, the Society nor the staff. It is very regrettable that the contribution that Humayun made to the conservation movement and to the study of natural history has not received the recognition and accolades that it deserves. Humayun's character was such that he had either committed friends or committed enemies. He was indeed a warm hearted person, and perhaps it would have helped if there had been only a thin, transparent carapace covering the warm heart.

Recently a senior staff member fell seriously ill and required a complicated heart operation. It was the culmination of a continuing illness, which had made him ineligible for health insurance. Finding funds was a problem. Though Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Seth Purshotamdas Thakurdas and Divaliba Charitable Trust, AFL Limited, Pirojsha Godrej Foundation, Cowasji Shavaksha Dinshaw Adenwalla Trust and a member helped, he still had to borrow heavily from his provident fund and from relations. The question arises: why not use public hospitals? Apparently surgeons have to be paid under the counter. The only time I had used a public facility was when I had my appendix removed at the Nair Hospital in Mumbai in the early fifties. The Registrar of the Surgery department was a friend, so I had the Head of Surgery operating on me, but what I still remember is the sound of our lunch thalis being washed in the common bathroom. Hygiene was the casualty.

The Society has a Staff Welfare Fund and it is necessary to build it up substantially. We would welcome your support. As you know, donations to the Society are tax exempt under section 80G of the IT Act.

... 2 ...

...2...

The Conservation Education Centre of the Society funded by the Overseas Development Authority of UK and situated on a 33 acre forested land adjoining the Borivli (Sanjay Gandhi) National Park donated for the Society's Centenary by the Maharashtra Government, and facilitated by Mrs Indira Gandhi, is the culmination of the Society's Nature Education efforts which commenced with a grant of Rs. 4500/- from the Government of Maharashtra in 1948. The Centre is now doing exemplary work among school children in Mumbai under the leadership of Prashant Mahajan, the Senior Education Officer, and the two Education Officers Deepak Apte and V. Shubhalaxmi. All three are achievers for whom any day and time is education time. We have been able to obtain financial support from the Tata Education Trust for the CEC's activities and the Burhani Foundation is supporting the Hornbill Clubs, which are being established in schools in Mumbai for inhouse environmental education.

Have you ever wondered at the identity of the flowers you see growing wild in your backyard or on the side of the road or in any open area. They are free spirits owned by no one. If you wish to know their identity, you must consult the Society's recent publication "**Common Indian Wild Flowers**" written and magnificently illustrated with photographs by Isaac Kehimkar, the Society's self taught naturalist in the tradition of Prater, McCann, and Salim Ali. Isaac is not only an expert on wild flowers and other flora, but also on insects, particularly butterflies. He is also an outstanding photographer. The Society has other inhouse talent. Deepak Apte of the CEC produced an excellent book on sea shells: **The Book of Indian Shells**. His photographs of the shells are particularly noteworthy. Traditionally the Society's staff and members have assisted in its campaign for natural history awareness by producing high quality, low cost publications.

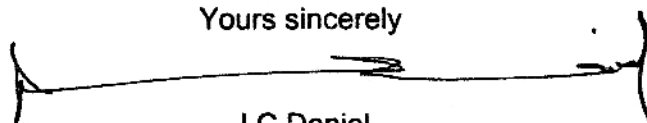
We have members in the SAARC countries who, as far as the Society is concerned, are offered the same facilities at the same cost as Indian members. Recently, the President was in Nepal and interacted with some of our members there. One among them, Mr. Suresh Shakya (e-mail: sushakya @ mos.com.np) has offered to assist members interested in bird watching visiting Nepal.

Dr Ashok Kothari has offered to make available to members the Society's publications and to receive membership subscriptions at his clinic -Treeshade Clinic, Next to Gokul Hotel, Saraswati Road, Santacruz (W) Mumbai 400 054 between 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon on working days. Members in the suburbs can make use of this facility. We thank Dr Kothari for this assistance. We would also advise that Dr Kothari has 2000 Neem seedlings available for free distribution. So if you have a bit of free (non-concrete) land, plant a neem.

May I remind you to recruit at least one or more members to be our partners in conservation.

Warm regards

Yours sincerely



J C Daniel
Honorary Secretary



Ranthambhore Foundation

Presents

“Nagarahole – Tales from an Indian Jungle”

An illustrated presentation
by **Shekar Dattatri**

**On Tuesday, 11th November 1997 at 6.30 p.m.
at the India International Centre, Max Mueller Marg.**

Shekar Dattatri is a naturalist turned professional wildlife filmmaker. He has been making wildlife and environmental documentaries for over ten years and frequently works as a freelance producer and wildlife cameraman with several reputed international companies. He runs a non-profit organisation called ‘Trust for Environmental Education’, and also a film making company in Madras, ‘Eco Media’. Films produced by Mr. Dattatri and his colleagues have won several national and international awards. An earlier documentary, “Silent Valley – An Indian Rainforest” won 2 National Awards including ‘Best Cinematography’ (non-feature), besides awards in Jackson Hole, USA and the Earthvision Film Festival in Tokyo, Japan.

“Nagarahole - Tales from an Indian Jungle” (52 min. video) chronicles a year in one of the finest “mega fauna” National Parks in the world. Twenty five years of zealous protection has turned this once disturbed and heavily logged forest in Karnataka into a wildlife paradise containing an astonishing variety and abundance of animal life. The park is one of the most important strongholds of the Indian elephant, and thanks to high densities of prey species, is packed with predators – notably tigers, leopards and wild dogs.

The film depicts the park through the seasons – from the bone dry summer to the pelting monsoon – and delves not just into the rich natural history of this forest but also the problems that confront it – illegal encroachments, massive fires, and the disruption of elephant corridors by plantations and settlements.

The Ranthambhore Foundation, in association with the India International Centre, organises one talk every month on wildlife, environment and other related subjects.

□ **DELHI OFFICE:** 19 KAUTILYA MARG, CHANAKYAPURI, NEW DELHI 110 021. PH.: 301 6261. FAX: 091 11 3019457.

□ **SAWAI MADHOPUR OFFICE:** 10 BAL MANDIR COLONY, MAN TOWN, SAWAI MADHOPUR 322 001. RAJASTHAN. PH.: (07462) 20286.

REGISTERED AS A NON PROFIT MAKING SOCIETY No. S/18252, F.C.R.A. No. 231650585, FOR THE CREATION OF A NATURAL INTEGRATION BETWEEN MAN, NATURE AND WILDLIFE.

Bombay Natural History Society



Founded 1883

Ref.692/2001

12th February 2001

Dear Member,

I am a Micawber type optimist and recently I wrote to all 2000 and more of our Life members, personal letters seeking a donation of Rs.5,000/- to the Society's Life Membership Corpus Fund. In the process I noticed that we were still carrying the names of some who have passed on, like my dear friend Erach Avari of Darjeeling/Coonoor and my ornithologist colleague Biswamoy Biswas. Amongst the familiar names of those living, one stood out, P V George Kainady, Dr Salim Ali's bird migration 'scout'. George was a remarkable and outstanding field biologist. George found the Bihar trappers who were to be our mainstay in the banding and ringing of ducks and waders, and found huge flocks of roosting wagtails in the sugarcane fields of Kerala by following flocks of wagtails flying to their roosting grounds. George left us for greener pastures in Iraq and returned to India and to his farm in Kerala, a sad loss to Ornithology.

The Bird Migration study was the first long term field study undertaken by Dr Salim Ali for the Society. It commenced in 1958 as an offshoot of the WHO's anxiety to determine the mode of transmission of the tick borne viral encephalitis that resembled an encephalitis prevalent in Russia. The disease had suddenly appeared in the Kysanur forests of Karnataka. Banding started as a means of identification of individuals of migratory or other species of birds examined for ticks, the possible carriers of the virus. Bird ticks were not the carriers, but the study of bird migration then started has continued to this day — whenever we could find the funds. During these forty- two years, substantial data has been obtained on migratory movements, populations and age structure of migratory and resident birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Presently, with funds from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, we have a project to train members and interested foresters in the techniques of bird migration studies. The project is headed by Dr S. Balachandran, curiously the only Ph. D. produced by the Bird Migration project. The basic aim of the current project is to establish a network of trained bird banders.

In December last year, I went to Rameswaram Island accompanied by Balachandran and Arvind, a member from Madurai, who is an agricultural scientist, an avid bird watcher and expert on indigenous bird trapping methods. Rameswaram was the area where Balachandran had collected most of the data for his doctoral thesis. We were examining areas suitable for a permanent bird banding base. Rameswaram and the smaller islands surrounding it, apart from an abundance of birds during the migratory season, hold the only coral reefs on the mainland other than Pirotan in Gujarat. The area has been designated as a Marine National Park for the Corals and the small population of the extremely rare and severely endangered dugong. Rameswaram is also a place of pilgrimage, the temple on the Island is of great sanctity. A dip in the ocean at auspicious points on the coasts of Rameswaram, especially at Dhanushkodi the southern tip, are required rituals. As in the case of other Sanctuaries and National Parks, the Marine National Park at Rameswaram is also threatened by "development". A deep water channel is planned to be cut, connecting Palk

...2...

...2...

Bay and the Gulf of Mannar for use by ships which otherwise have to go around Sri Lanka. I was advised by a member retired from the army that the channel would be of strategic importance. I am not convinced. A deepwater ship would be at the mercy of shallow draught missile armed speed boats, and a sitting duck for attack from the air due to its inability to manoeuvre. Currents will make dredging a constant necessity, while oil spillage and dredged sand will destroy the corals, sea weeds and the habitat as a whole, apart from the damage caused by the channel construction. Is it worth destroying a precious national heritage to save the sailing time of coastal shipping?

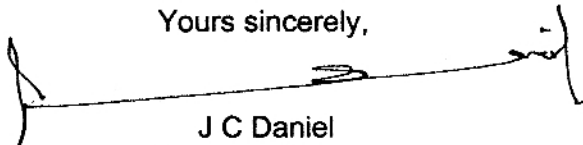
We visited the area where the channel was designed to cut across Rameswaram Island near the ancient Kothandaraman Temple, separating Dhanushkodi from the rest of the Island, an act of sacrilege. We walked around, watching a thin long pink streak of flamingos across the bay. Balachandran and Arvind bought a conch shell each, and for the rest of our stay they occasionally blew mournful blasts, sounding like a cow that had lost its calf.

The surrounding islands and their abundant bird fauna were a constant attraction. Balachandran had many friends among the fishermen from his student days. We sought them out and found that from grinding poverty they had graduated to telephones and cable TV. The spontaneous warmth of welcome remained, tender coconuts were offered and a boat was produced. We left the next morning for the fairly wooded Hare Island in the Marine National Park. Hare Island was earlier privately owned and had been planted with coconut and palmyra palms. The palms had lost their crowns to what Arvind diagnosed as bud rot and stood starkly headless. The island had peacocks and offered excellent camping sites. The next island, the scrub covered Manoli, is the Island of Birds — even from a distance we could see dense flocks of birds wheeling around. The tide was receding and we were singularly lucky to see a female dugong and her calf. In the excitement that followed, the boatman lost his concentration and grounded us on a hidden reef. All of us could swim, but the island seemed to be far off and for me there was a momentary flicker of fear; a frozen shoulder could have made Manoli, the nearest island, an Island too far. Fortunately, the engine backed us out and as we had sprung a leak, we made full speed for the mainland shore, and as we cut across the waves, were happily and completely drenched.

The sea had denied me access to Manoli, the Island of Birds, but gifted me with an unforgettable sighting of the dugong. I shall get back to the Island of Birds but with a lifejacket on me.

Warm Regards

Yours sincerely,


J C Daniel
Honorary Secretary

Bombay Natural History Society



Founded 1883

Ref. 1561/2001

9th April 2001

Dear Member,

You may recall that in my last letter I had written about the letter of request I had sent to Life Members of the Society. The response has been somewhat positive. About 6% of the 2073 Life members have generously responded. Thanks once again to them and to those who are planning to contribute. There has been some misunderstanding also. Some thought that they were being asked to pay their membership dues again. Let me assure emphatically that this is not so. My letter is a request and does not in any way affect your status as a Life Member. Whether you contribute or not, the Society will abide by the covenant we established with you when you joined, and shall continue to send you the three issues of the *Journal* (if you had joined before December 1999), the four issues of the *Hornbill*, and involve you and seek your assistance and advice in all its activities. We honour and thank you for your lifetime commitment to the Society. To those who have not responded so far, I repeat my appeal for assistance.

In the year 2000 we did a comprehensive exercise to review the activities of the Society. It resulted in the formulation of a Strategic Plan prepared by the Society's professionals, covering the major facets of the Society's activities, namely Membership, Research and Collections, Education and Awareness, Conservation Action, Fund raising, and Institution building.

The Society's ability to function as an independent environmental conservation oriented organisation depends on its membership strength. We have targeted an annual growth of 5000 in the number of members. At the end of 2001 we should have an additional 5000 members. This cannot be achieved without the active co-operation and assistance of present members. I therefore enclose a copy of the Society's prospectus and would request you to enroll one or more members, if necessary by making xerox copies of the prospectus. Membership forms can also be downloaded from our website www.bnhs.org. If you want more copies of the prospectus do let me know. We shall express the appreciation of the Society suitably to those who enroll a substantial number of members. I look forward to your assistance. If you have an e-mail address do let us know.

The membership as on 31st March is given below.

Annual 2237, Student 606, Institutional 151, Life 2073, total = 5067

During my last visit to Madurai, I met one of our members Dr Badri Narayanan, a second generation eye surgeon (his father is still practicing) who is actively engaged in trying to convert into a bird sanctuary, the Vandyoor Tank in the city which has an abundance of birds, both resident and migratory. Vandyoor is a perennial system tank, that is, a tank which is connected to a river system and stores the excess monsoon flow from the river. Many of the system tanks in Madurai city have been filled up for housing and government offices. As we understand, the Vandyoor tank is under threat, as a hotel is planned to be built where it exists. May I request members in Tamil Nadu to extend such assistance as they can to Dr Badri Narayan to turn the Vandyoor Tank into a city Bird Sanctuary. Dr Badri Narayan can be contacted on: 0452-58143.

...2...

Hornbill House, Dr. Salim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai - 400 023

Tel.: 282 1811 • Fax: (91 - 22) 283 7615 • Gram: HORNBILL

E-mail Numbers - Office: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in

Director: bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in

.. 2 ..

I had a pleasant surprise while bird watching with Dr Badri Narayan, Balachandran and Arvind at Kunathoor tank, about 15 km on the outskirts of Madurai. Dr Badri's spotter scope and tripod attracted the usual cluster of small boys. What was extraordinary was that two among them could identify accurately upto 50 species of the birds that we saw and give their Tamil names. Unless we can tap such interest, conservation of our wildlife would be an uphill task. I have sent them some material with the hope that their interest will be sustained.

I am involved with one of the four committees set up by the MoEF to examine the progress in the final notification of Sanctuaries and National parks as required by the Supreme Court. In this context, I had been to Hyderabad. Andhra Pradesh was ahead of the other southern states in regularising their Protected Areas. A member of my committee is Mr Pushpkumar, Retired Chief Wildlife Warden, A P and the doyen among Zoo Directors. He is presently assisting in the redesigning of the Trivandrum Zoo, an organisation particularly close to my heart. I had spent my formative years in it. No, not in one of the cages, nevertheless an inmate as my father was the Honorary Director of the Zoo and I grew up in the Director's bungalow in the Zoo. As we discussed the Zoo, I related the story of the male Lion-tailed Macaque, a supercilious thug who used to swagger to and fro on the top tier of his two tier cage with his head and tail cocked up, pretending to ignore the visitors who gawked at him. If anyone was careless enough to stand in front of his water trough, he would suddenly dash forward and into the trough, scooping water on to the unwary visitors, drenching them. He would then do a war dance, shaking the bars of his cage and return to promenading. I was astonished when Mr Pushpkumar said that the present incumbent also behaved similarly. Obviously, it has become a part of the behaviour repertoire of the alpha male. I cannot think of any other explanation for the behaviour being seen 57 years after I last witnessed it. Primates do have ways of venting their frustration on people. Mr Pushpkumar related the story of a chimpanzee in the Hyderabad Zoo who used to throw stones and anything else he could lay his hands on at visitors who passed in front of his cage. The late Mr N T Rama Rao when Chief Minister had visited the zoo. NTR had a way of carrying the stage with him wherever he went and grandiosely waved aside Pushpkumar's words of caution, saying that the Chimp was his friend. The friend did not lose the opportunity to clean bowl him with an underarm throw of gooey turd right on the Chief Minister's chest.

Hyderabad has a very active and friendly group of bird watchers in the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh. The leading lights are Aasheesh Pittie and Siraj Taher. They publish a chatty and informative Newsletter, **Pitta** for their members and an occasionally published Journal, the **Mayura**. Aasheesh has produced an admirable bibliography of Indian Ornithology, which lists over 60,000 references. A labour of love, which has taken him approximately 15 years to complete. The compilation is available on a CD. Those who are interested in obtaining this invaluable data base can contact Aasheesh at E-mail: aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in.

With Warm Regards



**J C Daniel
Honorary Secretary**